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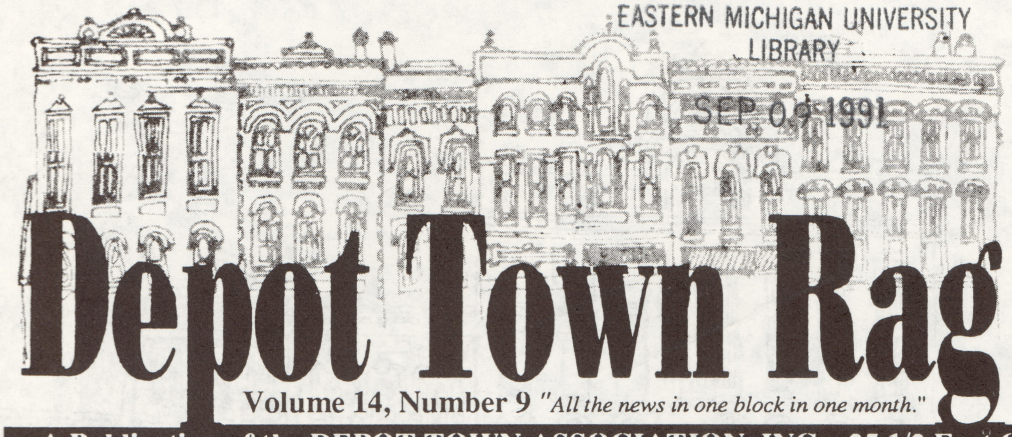


Depot Town Rag

Volume 14, Number 9 *"All the news in one block in one month."*

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. , 25 1/2 East Cross Street, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

100% FREE Rag content
September 1991

- **Festival follow-up**
- Promotions pay off
- ***Local daily recognized***
- **Fall Fair**

. . . and other strictly local stuff

Annual DTA Election

7:30 pm Thursday, 19 September 1991
around the old Caboose.
Bring a lawn chair, pay your dues, and help set the priorities for 1992!

With your help, we"ll still meet the goal of "doubling foot traffic by June 1992!"

Signs, benches in place, shanty coming

DTA, DDA, City officials and citizens cooperate to improve the neighborhoood around the depot

This summer's activity in the old railroad district saw a second burst of energy to meet the 1976 goals of the Depot Town Association. Private and public sectors came together in another effort to revitalize the commercial district down at the train station. The replication of the Watchman's Shanty at the track crossing is, perhaps, the most optimistic signal that historic preservation and community effort can pay off in a traditional, urban commercial district.

Take a moment to sit on one of the new benches and offer thanks for the following:

The Crossing Guard Shanty
The Shadow Signs
Lots of new trees
Park benches
Landscaping and fencing
Dumpster enclosures

and a continuing creative relationship between citizens and their elected officials. The formation of the Depot Town Downtown Development Authority several years ago was a good start, the progress tedious at times, but the summer of 1991 saw all those prioritization sessions finally pay off for the good of the district.

Special recognition must go to those good neighbors and property owners who had the foresight to be included in the DDA plan from the beginning.

"Where the City that works comes to play"

McMillan and dogs in the park

When Depot Towner Amy McMillian takes her dogs out to walk several times each day, she must feel like Ypsilanti's gorgeous parks are her own personal backyard. She should. She not only lives 'up over the store' with her pups, Meagan and Chelsea, but she's the City's director of Parks and Recreation, too.

Many residents of the block have noted that Riverside Park and Frog Island are perceived as the district's back yard, too, and you don't have to be a City official to feel some pride of ownership for thesetwo delighful green spaces along the shores of the Huron River.

Just this last year, Amy and her City Hall compatriots added to Chicago's old slogan and put it on T-shirts for the kids in the parks to wear and think about. Mayor Daley's son would do well to find as many happy faces among his constituency. Work and play go together in both towns.

Events like Heritage Festival in August and the Frog Island Jazz Fest in June always draw thousands of new folks to these two unique urban spaces and, if the growing crowds are any indication, they come back afterward to enjoy the places when the crowd abates.

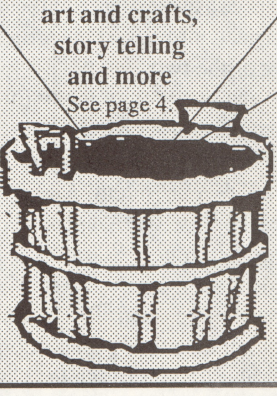
It was a piece of creative genius that linked the two parks to Depot Town with the three-way 'Tridge' which passes below the Cross Street Bridge, and no one finds this delightful piece of architectural whimsy by driving their car through the area. You have to participate.

And that's the nature of life in the parks. Participation. Talking to everybody you meet. Say 'hello' - even if you don't know them yet.

And say 'hello' to Amy McMillan, too. And pet the dogs and feed the ducks and listen to the concert and admire the old cars and play ball and jog a few laps and sit in the shade and fish for a little while and be glad you're a kid from Ypsilanti, Michigan!

October 5 Fall Fair:

Heritage craft demonstratins,
scarecrow galleries,
Pie-eating contest,
art and crafts,
story telling
and more
See page 4.



DepotTown DDA approves bids for long hoped-for neighborhood improvements

This summer's session of the Depot Town Downtown Development Authority [DDA] saw new cooperation between the district's active problem solvers and officials of the City government. One hot evening in the Freighthouse saw DDA members, Mayor, Councilmembers and City staffers meet to approve bids for the following amenities in the district:

- Shanty building supplies - $1994.56
- Electricity for the Shanty - $2045.00
- New signs A - $2543.00
  B - $1782.00, C - $1782.00,
  D - $4068.00, E - $1500.00
- 10 wrought iron and wood benches - $450.00
- Enclosures for the north side dumpster - $3960.00
- 13 silver maple trees (or their equivalent) - $845.00
- Landscaping for the Shanty - $340.71
- Fencing at the Shanty - $350.00

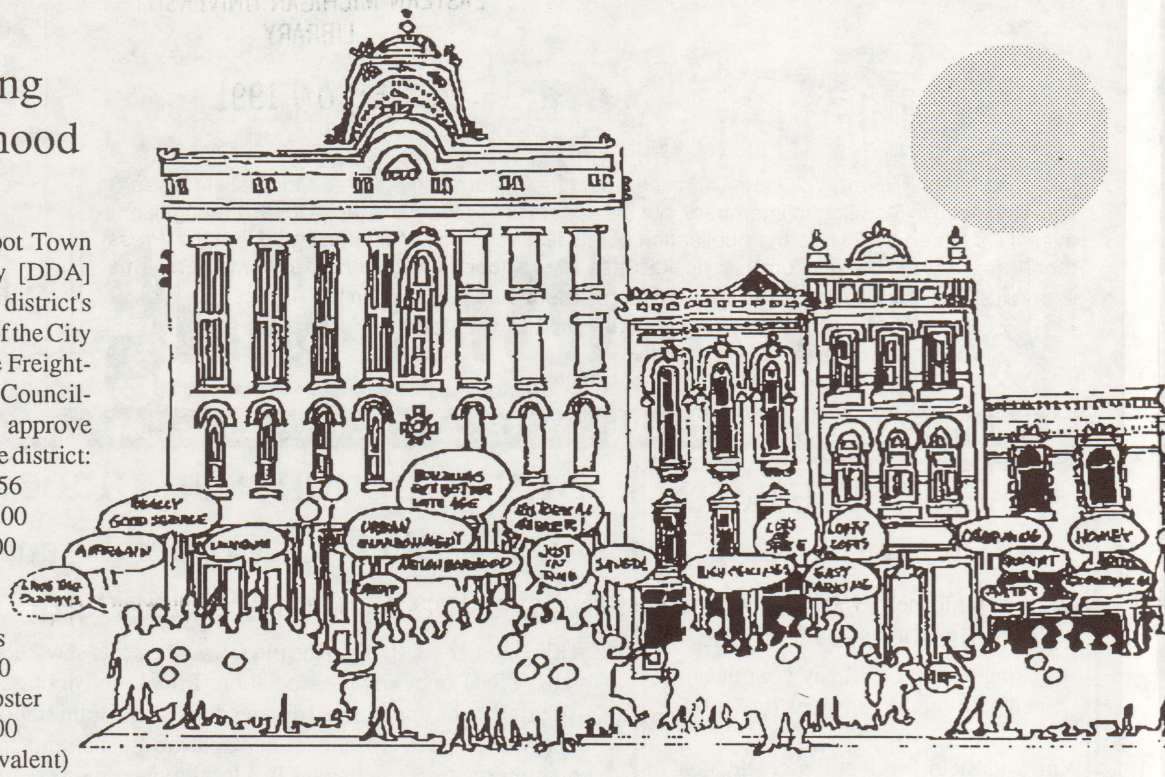
Total cost for the entire list of improvements is $21,660.00, to be expedited through City offices. Change orders for under- and overage possibilities will be examined by DDA chair, Paul Fetters of River Artworks.

The above listed items have long been on the top priority list for many folks in the neighborhood. Most should be completed and installed during the last part of the 1991 summer season. Some say, "There's always something fun to watch down by the railroad tracks, thanks to our loyal politicos."

The cost of painting the Shanty [formerly called the Signal Tower, but since corrected!] was not included in the package. DDA appointees are hoping that, after a summer of painting private properties on the block, neighbors will simply wash out their brushes and come on down by the tracks to give the Shanty a couple of licks, too.

Public and private portions of Depot Town have kept in constant balance as the renovation of the district continues. This project will see a merging of the two.

Thanks are in order to many for this most recent success: Mayor King, Councilmember Murdock, City staffer Mike Agar, intern Scott Holmgren, DTA president Bill French, DDA chair Paul Fetters, DDA appointees Richie, Monaghan, Hummel, Sikorski, McKeever, Dodd, and, of course, all those loyal neighbors who chose to align themselves with the DDA plan. It's their tax money that is coming back to the neighborhood through the City budget.



"History isn't *was*; it's *is*!" -William Faulkner

. . . and just about everybody in southeast Michigan turns out every year to take part -- in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town.

All history is *local*, too. It just gets read at different levels. Depot Towners seem to get to help make it *and* write it.

It has been the local custom - the last several years of history - to publish the September issue of *The Rag* a few days early so that the district's newer associates will be able to see that this local charm is not just a three-day festival. As this issue is circulated the final day of the August 1991 Ypsilanti Heritage Festival, some readers will wonder how so much local history ever happened here and not in Henry Ford's Greenfield Village.

Depot Town didn't get assembled here from other places. It grew here from the days of the Michigan Territory when this was as far west as you could go on the railroad.

The locals were a feisty lot -- and they still are. That's why Ypsilanti keeps getting in the history books and on the eleven o'clock news, too. It's an old tradition of doing things for the first time and being highly creative. That's what makes history around here.

That's what makes history every place else, too, and a few locals wonder why everybody hasn't figured that out yet. Andy Warhol did and he was only an artist. Sort of.

With those old commercial buildings in every block of every town in the midwest, one might wonder if there really is a housing crisis in the nation. Why are most second, third and fourth floors empty across the country?

With the landfills filled, why doesn't every neighborhood have a recycling station?

With so many great stories to tell - and the advent of desktop publishing - why doesn't every block of Americana have its own little local newspaper?

With so many interesting people around, why aren't every street and sidewalk crowded with people talking and singing and dancing and laughing and shopping together?

After all, if *we* are not perceived as owning the place, *somebody else* will be.

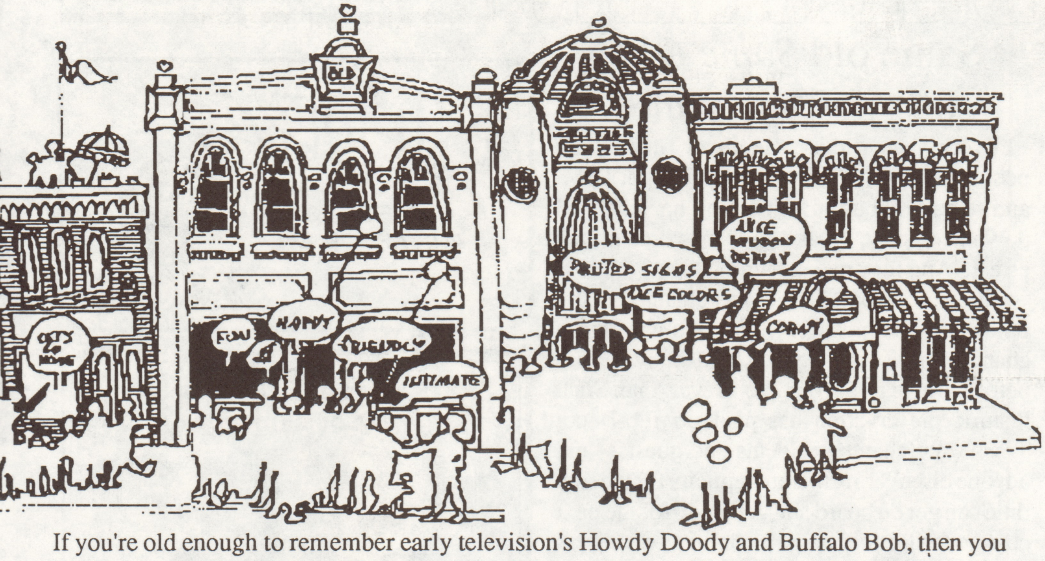
Let the ethic of Heritage Festival grow to other communities. Let's take a few more turns around the dance floors of our old towns. It's time to make some more history.

24-hour Hot Line

Call: 482-YPSI

for information on historic Depot Town!

Welcome to historic Depot Town's Summerfallwinterspring Festival!



If you're old enough to remember early television's Howdy Doody and Buffalo Bob, then you probably can recall their romantic protagonist: Princess Summer/Fall/Winter/Spring. We'd like to nomiate her for Queen of Depot Town, since the all-year theme fits us both so well.

Locals are always afraid that 'tourists' who hit the block during the annual Ypsilanti Heritage Festival will go away with the impression that this hometown hype happens only for three days of the year. Perhaps the Princess' reign could call attention to some of the other attractions which contribute to the continuity of the good life in Our Town:

• The Ypsilanti Farmers' Market goes two days a week in the historic Freighthouse all year long.

• Jazz emanates from this old district throughout the year with the Frog Island Festival in June and concerts and performances popping up continually. August's Heritage Jazz Competition serves as a good 'table of contents' for music on this block for the rest of the year.

• November through January sees the Victorian Holiday accompany Riverside Park's Festival of Lights with special sales, concerts, evening gigs at local taverns and more. It's a unique opportunity to dress up in silly, old Victorian clothing and still get outside in the winter time. Horse-drawn seigh rides usually wind up being buggy or wagon rides that time of year, but Santa's entry is not the kind you'll find on any TV channel.

• Street activity is probably the most exciting part of the Depot Town ambiance. Managers at area malls are continually hyping projects to entice shoppers into their corridors throughout the year. Anyone driving through Depot Town can tell you that it's a regular activity down here. Seems there's always somebody crossing the street or standing on the sidewalk talking to friends and acquaintances.

• Planting and harvesting take up a big part of the annual calendar. And when they're not current, even snow shoveling is an event. All such activities could be done by special contractors, but there's a certain pride taken in the job when you do it yourself. And it's another way to get to know everybody.

• Building maintenance is a year-round event, too, we suppose, although we have to stretch it a bit to call it an event. When the stage for your show is a hundred and thirty years old - and people really want to see what it was like back then - you've always got something to do. Plumbing, caulking, or painting enjoy a prominent place on the list of year-round activities in Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town.

Al fresco, extramural, open-air dining in Depot Town

You can practicaly live on the sidewalks down in old Depot Town. There are plenty of benches around the flower beds on Cross Street, along the dock at the Freighthouse, and in front of Ike's Barbershop.

One of the nicest attributes of the old railroad district is the variety of sidewalk cafés which line the street. You can sit down and someone will bring food and drink and sit it down right in front of you! It's almost like being a kid again and being strapped into your high chair.

• **Aubree's Saloon** is the only spot on the block where you can order alcoholic beverages to accompany your lunch or dinner and, even though there aren't any swinging doors on the planters, the same rules apply as in any licensed liquor establishnment: you can't take it in or out. It must be consumed on the premises, of course.

• **Red Rooster Pizza & Dairy Bar** is right next door and you can order ice cream or pizza inside and then take it out front to watch the street action.

• **Miller's Ice Cream Parlor & Emporium** has added a soup and sandwich line this season and many stop by there for their morning coffee in summer. Evening sees dozens of folks sitting with their cones, as well. There's often a leashed dog wagging and waiting nearby just in case anyone drops theirs, too. It's OK to feed them.

• **J&R Trading Post** has expanded to three store fronts and the one on the west end actually serves through the window for snackers in the shade of the district's most venerable hotel: The Follett House. Sitting on the west end affords an excellent opportunity to try to decipher the ancient billboards on the brick wall above.

Walking through sidewalk café copies in highway malls just doesn't seem to create the same effect no matter how clever the murals and plastic plants. Somehow, we seem to need the breeze and the neighborhood wave, too.

Was it always that way down here? Not until you came. That's when it really got nice!

Sign in the Freighthouse:

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August 8 DTA meeting:

Only 3 items of business . . .

1. **Approved budget for Heritage Jazz.**
2. **Cornice lights are on for Heritage Fest.**
3. **Fall events at the Freighthouse.**

D.T.A. President's message:

Depot Town is often described as a charming, quaint, historic business district located between the Huron River and the railroad tracks in Ypsilanti. But as everyone knows, we are *more* than a business district. We are, in my opinion, personified by the *people* who choose to live, own property, operate businesses, and shop in Depot Town.

This became crystal clear when my wife and business partner, Sandee, received a call at home from a woman, Virginia Adamick, who was disturbed because last month's Depot Town *Rag* did not describe the Signal Tower as it really was. She knew — because she remembered it.

After Sandee explained that we were not trying to reproduce the original design, but rather create a landmark to help identify our neighborhood, the conversation became very interesting. This lady was sharper than a tack.

Not only could she remember the original Signal Tower, she could remember the people who operated the businesses in Depot Town, inquisitive kids who would grow up to be our present day community leaders, the beautiful gardens surrounding the Depot and the man who tended the gardens, the train derailment that took out a section of a building that now houses the Sidetrack and how lucky the couple who lived in the building were because the man had just left that section of the building and went next door and his wife was upstairs doing the laundry when the train forever changeed the landscaping in Depot Town.

changeed the landscaping in Depot Town.

When Virginia was a little girl, she just couldn't understand why anyone would want to move to the West Side of Ypsilanti when Depot Town had everything: a cemetery on River Street, Weber's Pharmacy, Colvitter's Ice Cream Parlour, Follett House Hotel, and friends and neighbors who knew everybody and their children.

Tomorrow's memories of Depot Town and it's people will be remembered by the children who live in Ypsilanti today. The summer of 1991 will recall Paul Fetter's new awning, Bonni and Ed Fine's new porch and tuck-pointed facade on their building, Tom and Bettie Dodd's selling the Masonic Block to Richard Reid, Old Town Coin & Gold's fresh coat or paint, Carolyn and Gary McKeever's new four story porch, the new facade painting of Depot Doo and Our Little Secret, the super cooperation from the City of Ypsilanti with our Association's efforts in planting trees, establishing directional signs, and building the landmark Signal Tower, Rex and Sally Richie's selling Miller's Ice Cream Parlor to Gwen and David Blackmer, and the contribution John and Shirley Kornilakis' Old Town Restaurant made to the history of Depot Town.

Virginia, every Saturday morning a lot of Depot Towners meet at the coffeeshop in the Freighthouse for a donut, cup of coffee, and conversation. Please join us. You have memories to share.

- Bill French, your prez.

September 1991

Depot Townèrs are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

Depot Town Association Annual Election Meeting

7:30 p.m. Thursday, 19

Around the Old Caboose

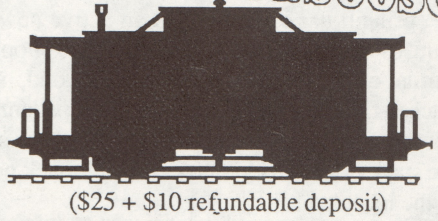
Depot Town Antique Engine Club Annual Election Meeting & Cook-Out!

6:00 p.m. Thursday, 26

Freighthouse Coffeeshop and Deck

You can rent

The Old Caboose



($25 + $10 refundable deposit)

Call 483-4256.

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

-Tom Dodd, editor

The Depot Town Association, Inc.

A. William French, president

c/o The Old Caboose

400 Market Place

Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Active Memberships :

• Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce

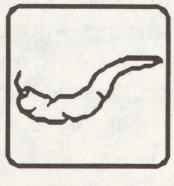
October 5th Fall Fair

celebrates the growing season

At the Frieghthouse, the farm wagon and in Depot Town!

Pie Eating Contest
Heritage Craft Demonstrations
Arts 'n' Crafts Exhibitors
Scarecrow Galleries
Story Telling on the Farm Wagon
Little Engineers' Photo Gallery
Specials on Cross & River Streets

Old-Time Community
Pot Luck (6:30 pm)
& Country Dance (7:15 pm)
-traditional - folk - country - polka-
featuring SKYLARK:
vocal trio w/ hammered dulcimer,
guitar, fiddle, banjo At the Frieghthouse



Get Ready for Fall!

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Stop in and See Us,

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YPSI DIXIT: All the news that fits, we print

News organizations around the block or the world

Did you know that Ypsilanti had a daily newspaper? (Such a snide opening line can only be attributed to a June editorial in the Ypsilanti *Press* regarding their informative trip around Ypsilanti's Ward Five with our two City Councilmembers, but the editors of *The Rag* are happy for any recognition, even if it's fifteen years into the publication of this little monthly. We're just glad that the *Press* reporters are coming away from their desks to see what's happening beyond their computers. This item will serve to introduce our readers to the plethora of local dailies in the district.)

Local daily newspapers are having a tough time in the big cities and few towns in America can boast any rivalry between publications. Even the nearby city of Detroit has seen the merger of its *News* and *Free Press* and few readers can remember the *Times* or any lesser - now absent - dailies. Smaller towns across the country are settling for regional versions of national computerized news characterized by many as "newspapers for stupid people in a hurry." They boast a four-color weather map for people in air conditioned environments who can't see the sky from their work station through hermetically sealed grey-tinted windows. Ypsilanti, however, has enjoyed a local sheet for many years and several other dailies appear, as well, on the newsstands in front of the Old Town Restaurant down in the railroad district. We can keep up on every publisher's version of what is important to them. After all, it is *they* who decide what the news will be. The readers simply decide whose version of the news they choose to read and/or believe.

Ypsilanti has long enjoyed an active newspaper climate, and no wonder, with the earliest industries being paper mills. While we chopped down the hardwood forest from the Michigan 'smile' of prairie to Mackinac and beyond, our presses ground out copy enough to cover every kitchen floor from here to Demetrius Ypsilanti's hometown back in Greece. And then some. Just about any literate town in America could be said to have fostered the need for recycling, just by the stack of last week's news on their back porches every Saturday morning. Some of it is still in the local land fill.

Early papers in Ypsilanti included the *Ypsi Dixit* (a play on the legal term and still ironic today), *The Ypsilantian* and other contemporaries of early area businesses. In those days, our block wasn't really called Depot Town, but described as "at the depot." Today's parallel might be seen in "at the mall."

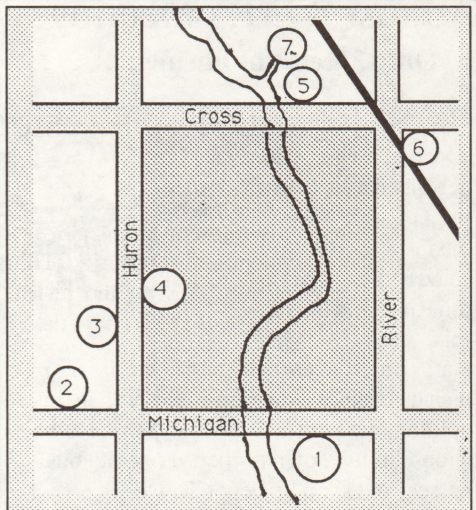
The current Ypsilanti *Press* actually began in an office on Pearl Street, then moved to a former automobile dealership on Michigan Avenue before the advent of historic preservation. For many years *The Press* bragged about its "Golden Triangle" which included Belleville, Stony Creek, Milan, Willis, and even Depot Town. Much of the *Press'* current readership is from the Belleville/Van Buren area.

The behemoth *Ann Arbor News*, in an effort to capture a larger share of the local market, established a local office in the old Ladies' Library on North Huron Street and titillates the local palate with photos of things ancient in Our Town. New stuff gets in there, too, with a special edition slanted toward Ypsilanti readers. Pick up an Ann Arbor version someday and compare the differences. News readers love to contrast the Ypsi/Ann crime reports. Ypsilanti's crime is unfiltered and much more entertaining to read. Reporters can get the actual police report, unlike Ann Arbor, where a public information officer filters the news for public consumption.

Many fledgling reporters began at Ypsilanti's small town daily and moved on to bigger newsrooms. Terry Anderson, still being held hostage in Lebanon, was a reporter for the *Press*. Probably the largest group of *Press* writers extant can be found among the more creative writers at the Ann Arbor *News*. They seemed to have found their background and color here, then opted for the bigger organization. Sometimes it takes a few months of regular reading to realize that your favorite local reporter is now on the *other* payroll. Such is the perspective of many Ypsilanti readers who subscribe to both papers for a hoped-for balance of local news.

There is also the kind of reader who only takes the Big City Papers. These are probably the folks who don't bother to vote in the local elections either, believing that only the national stuff is important. However, readers of local news *do* know what the others are missing. And that's not what the eleven o'clock news is made of. The other kind of reader might do well to only digest what the tabloids have to say. That's certainly not very personal or immediate.

Ypsilanti's local news gets a variety of slants and discerning readers may find it fascinating to note how far apart the editorial contents of our dailies and monthlies can range when they find their seed in so tiny a garden space. On the block upon which Depot Town sits, a veritable cacophony of selective objectivities can be found. Walk from East Cross Street to North River Street, to Michigan Avenue, up North Huron Street and back to the old neighborhood, and you'll have passed enough editorial content to make Citizen Kane's mind reel.



A Readers' Guide:

A short walk around the block will easily identify a thriving community of newswriting organizations and communication media"

1. The Ypsilanti *Press*
2. CBC's *Newsletter*
3. Chamber of Commerce *Focus*
4. The Ann Arbor *News*
5. Hansen's Standard Printing
6. The *White Triangle News*
7. The Depot Town *Rag*

Addendum:
If "NEWS" really means North, East, West and South, this *must* be the place!

Start with the Ypsilanti *Press* on Michigan Avenue and then commence toward downtown on the other side of the Huron River. The Central Business District publishes its monthly newsletter, *CBC News*, out of Chris Maxton's computer palace - and it's published through the Chamber of Commerce around the corner on North Huron. The Chamber also has its own, *Focus*, which is a monthly focusing on local business promotion.

Across Huron Street is the The Ann Arbor *News*, but their printing is done in the home office on Ann Arbor's Huron Street.

Return to East Cross Street and you'll note that not only does Ypsilanti's Depot Town provide a base for *The Rag*, but it is the home of the monthly slicker for collectors of Hudson, Essex and Terraplane motorcars, *The White Triangle News*, edited by local Hudson dealer Jack Miller. Both publications are printed at Hansen's Standard Printing Company in Depot Town.

Mark Twain would have loved living in Ypsilanti. The fact that there's a hot-bed of controversy also makes for good copy. And it *was* local editor, Samuel Clemens, who said, "To complain about your local paper is to argue with your visage in a glass." Maybe that's why so many local dailies are called *The Mirror*. We seem to get what we deserve

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A Depot Town SAMPLER

Same old *Same Old*, just isn't the same

Every year at this time about fifty zillion people flock into Ypsi's quaint old Depot Town and remark about how "nothing has changed down here since I was a kid" or words to that effect. And they're dead wrong.

The old railroad district has changed many times, and the most recent change was that it changed back to a style it had known once before. But that't not obvious to everyone. Such historic preservation has paid off for Depot Town's merchants, residents and guests-- and anyone discovering this authenticity for the first time can get on board and get ready for the next change for this old neighborhood.

Depot Town's next decade promises to be as exciting as the last one and there's always room for more passengers on this train.

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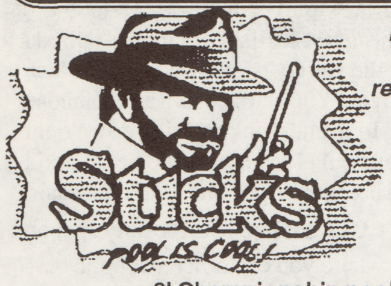
THERE IS A MATERIAL DIFFERENCE



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